

Case Study: Stage Manager - Harriet

What do you do?

I am the company stage manager of a repertory theatre. This is a theatre which produces its own work on a four weekly cycle, so at any one time when one play is rehearsing another play performs in the evening.

I am in charge of several teams of stage management. These teams are responsible for organising the production through rehearsals and performances, liaising with production departments and finding the props required for a show.



What is your background?

I was very interested in drama at school, but I never wanted to perform. I preferred organising things behind the scenes. When I left school after doing A levels I went to a drama school on a technical theatre course and trained as a stage manager. Then I came to a theatre as an assistant stage manager and I worked my way up through the team to be a company manager.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

All stage managers need to be patient, organised, very diplomatic and always helpful. You need to be good at communicating with lots of different people, from directors and actors to electricians and carpenters - right through to members of the audience and people in local businesses.

Ideally, you should be good at word processing and good at talking on the phone. You should be good at working within a team, but also prepared to take responsibility for your own tasks.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

In theatre, stage managers might work in the West End in London on one show for several years. Or they could work on a show that tours around the country - in a different city every week, or even every day.

Other related jobs would be production assistant in television or production runner in film, or organising conferences for large organisations.

What changes will there be in the future?

Funding for repertory theatre is always worrying. Local authority grants haven't increased. Overall, I think there will be tighter budgets, fewer staff and fewer productions.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

The most challenging thing about repertory theatre is that we do a different play every few weeks, so we're always working with new actors, and have to find new props and furniture. For example, last season we did the Wizard of Oz, and I had to find a real dog. I had to get an old fashioned camera that would flash for another production, and I had to find two vintage cars to be driven on to the stage.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

Getting work as an ASM is not as easy as it used to be as theatres are generally taking on less staff at that level. However, a good DSM or SM is always in great demand.

What do you like about your job?

Things I like about my job would be organising a very big musical production, with lots of actors, musicians and

technical staff to organise.

I like finding a very difficult prop and the sense of achievement that you feel when you've found it.

And also seeing a production through - there is always a sense of achievement when you've worked on something for several months and you finally see it in front of an audience.

What do you dislike about your job?

My dislikes aren't very many because I do love my job, but one of them would be having to tell actors off when they are late, which is my job as a company manager. I really hate tidying up the prop stores because they are always in a mess.

And I suppose sometimes you wish you could have a big tantrum about something, but my job is to remain calm and sort out everyone else's tantrums. It would be nice once in a while to stomp off in a huff.

What are your ambitions?

One ambition I have is to teach stage management at a drama school. But generally I am happy doing my job.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

For anyone considering a career in theatre backstage, I would recommend getting involved with amateur groups and schools groups. Also try to get work experience at your local theatre.

Once you are over the age of 16, you could try and get employment at your local theatre - either as an usher or on the technical team when they are setting up the next show.

A day in the life

9:30 am - 10:00 am

Meet team in rehearsal room - prepare for the day by setting up props and furniture. Check what needs to be done, and that tea and coffee is ready.

10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Rehearsals start. The deputy stage manager stays in rehearsals while the rest of the team spend time borrowing, getting donations, hiring or buying props for the production.

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Lunch.

2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Set up for the evening performance. Make sure all props and furniture are in starting positions.

5:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Supper break for the team.

7:00 pm - 7:30 pm

The audience is let into the auditorium. Make announcement that performance is about to start.

7:30 pm - 10:00 pm

Move scenery and props as cued. Make sure all changes of lighting and sound go smoothly.

10:00 pm

The performance ends. Lock up any valuables, turn off lights and secure stage for the evening.

